

STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY

In 1998, the Zoo board of directors and staff, under the direction of an outside planning consultant, worked together to develop a 5-year Strategic Plan for the Folsom Children's Zoo and Botanical Gardens. The plan, including goals and action steps was updated in 2000. To guarantee that the plan is properly implemented, updated, and evaluated, quarterly reviews of the plan and its measures of success are conducted by the staff and the board of directors. The four major goals of the 2000 strategic plan and their measures of success are:

1. To become the premier family attraction in the area--measured by increased attendance, increased memberships, and increased participation in zoo sponsored activities by all segments of Nebraska's population. Also measured by media coverage, financial contributions, and in-kind community gifts.
2. To increase and diversify sources of revenue and support--measured by the kinds and amount of "new" money received each year including grants, gifts, and unsolicited contributions.
3. To create a master plan for the zoo and environs.
4. To promote and expand on excellence in educational programming--measured by increased participation in programs by individuals, classrooms, and school districts; constant evaluation of program and material effectiveness by teachers and administrations; and the development and implementation of cooperative research projects with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Folsom Children's Zoo & Botanical Garden's mission is to 'influence present and future generations through conservation, education, and related research as well as to encourage interaction with nature, plants, and animals in an enjoyable atmosphere. This program which opens our gates to welcome our community's new residents of all nationalities fits well with our mission.

The Folsom Children's Zoo board engaged a professional strategic planning team to develop the Strategic Plan. The board and staff both held planning retreats and the strategic planners conducted community interviews with over 30 key players from the community, business sector, education field, and past zoo board members. A membership survey with zoo members as well as a community wide survey was conducted. Encounter interviews with visitors were also conducted on the zoo grounds. After receiving all of this feedback and then upon analyzing all of the results, the strategic planners assisted the zoo board in developing its new Mission Statement and also in the development of 4 strategic goals with action steps. A timeline for accomplishing those action steps was then established.

Currently, the strategic plan/planning committee chair sits on the executive committee and consults with the finance committee in making certain that the strategic planning steps are funded.

Subsequent to the development of the Strategic Plan, the board has hired architects, additional education staff, expanded greatly on education programs and worked aggressively at enlarging targeted audience such as refugees and immigrants.

The zoo board has committed financial resources to all of the above and continues assisting staff in the fund raising of additional dollars to finance specific action steps of the strategic plan.

To date, the zoo board has spent in excess of \$250,000 to accomplish strategic plan goals.

Folsom Children's Zoo & Botanical Gardens
Strategic Plan Revisions
As approved by the Board of Directors - June 27, 2000

Goal #1:

To become the premier family attraction in the area

Objectives:

- Become a year-round destination
- Continually evolve and improve exhibits and attractions
- Increase and enhance opportunities for interaction with the Zoo.
- Define highest-potential target audiences and market to them

Goal #2:

To increase and diversify audiences, sources of revenue and support.

Objectives:

- Build specific and targeted contributions programs for the Zoo
- Increase membership revenues by 5% annually through corporate packaging and general membership drive
- Explore hiring a sales/marketing staff person
- Explore creating an additional fundraising event in the spring similar to Boo At The Zoo
- Develop package programs; i.e. zoo rentals, seniors groups, zoo tours with goal to increase general revenue programs.
- Increase attendance of under-served and diverse populations.
- Explore ways to increase per capita spending

Goal #3:

To create a master plan for the Zoo, Triangle and environs.

Objectives:

- Engage in master planning process with outside consultation including cost benefit analysis by June 2001
- Work with Lincoln Public Schools to determine a permanent location/structure for ZooSchool
- Expand campus to accommodate more students in Zoo sponsored activities and programs

Goal #4:

To promote and expand our excellence in educational programming.

Objectives:

- Develop additional educational programming for highest-potential target audiences.
- Collaborate on community-wide science teaching initiatives
- Explore additional educational staffing
- Explore development of a Community Science Academy

NARRATIVE

1. PROJECT DESIGN

The influx of foreign-born immigrants more than doubled in Nebraska between 1990 and 2000 due to the selection of Lincoln, Nebraska as a U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement site. Lincoln is one of the top-twenty cities in America for new arrivals from abroad. Because the Folsom Children's Zoo and Botanical Gardens serves as a center of community engagement, the "Opening the Gates" Program was conceived and implemented in the summer of 2002.

In order to welcome and encourage Lincoln's expanding culturally diverse population to the Zoo, Folsom Children's Zoo and Botanical Gardens will have all public announcements translated into Vietnamese, Russian, Arabic, Spanish, and Bosnian and recorded onto compact discs (CD's). The Zoo will purchase a public paging /phone system that will allow the zoo to play these announcements in several languages throughout the outdoor portion of the Zoo and inside all public buildings. Limited copies of existing printed materials will be printed in the same languages and checked out at the admission gate. Exhibits and buildings will be labeled in these languages as well. Interpretive sound posts at the exhibits will be programmed with the option to hear the message in these languages.

In 2003 the Zoo hired an outreach coordinator who has formed close partnerships between the Zoo and various agencies and cultural community centers throughout the community. These relationships are helping to open lines of communication with our target population that result in greater awareness of the Zoo, its programs, and its desirability as a destination.

In our visits with, and surveys of these populations, we have discovered that the zoo is not a welcoming place for those who do not speak or read English. Our expectations of guests are not obvious and there are no provisions made for those who have never been here before to 'learn the ropes' in a comfortable, non-threatening way. *Appendix 1*

With an IMLS Museums for America grant we will overcome these shortcomings in this way:

- Upgrade a public communication system that allows us to relay public service announcements to visitors in multiple languages
- Translate standard announcements (emergency, closing, seal demonstrations, zoo train departures, weather and other public safety announcements, etc. and record them on compact discs.
- Create a welcome banner and translate entrance instructions into multiple languages
- Create copies of our Zoo map where exhibits are labeled in languages other than English
- Translate the Safari Cafe menu so non-English speakers may indicate their choices
- Label restroom locations, first aid stations, phones, exits, and entrances in all languages
- Change the signs on our animals exhibits to include the identified languages
- Add more auditory interpretive centers and add additional language options to our existing ones

Through a series of meetings, the outreach coordinator has also educated the Zoo board and staff about the cultural communities and the challenges that face immigrants in the community. After polling other community non-profits and organizations, the Zoo is creating a workshop that will share what we have learned, introduce others to the "network" and encourage inclusion of these new residents in future programming throughout the community.

2. GRANT PROGRAM GOALS

There are two goals for the "Opening the Gates" program:

1. To create an atmosphere at the Zoo where visitors who don't speak English fluently, will be safe, feel comfortable and be welcome.
2. To create a model that shares the progress, pitfalls, and knowledge the Zoo amasses with other facilities and non-profits that want to become aware of and better serve Lincoln's diverse audience.

The criteria for measuring success will include:

- The extent and cohesiveness of the network established by the outreach coordinator through contacts with individuals, community centers, and organizations
- Inclusion of the zoo in community cultural events and activities
- Use of the zoo as a location for community cultural events and activities
- Increased understanding of cultural difference by zoo staff and board - as measured by pre and post surveys
- Increased attendance at the zoo, increased purchase of annual memberships, and increased amount of time spent at the zoo by targeted individuals and families
- Presentation of "Opening the Gates" workshops to other community groups and regional and non profit institutes including the members of the Nebraska Museums Association and AZA conferees
- Use of the zoo model for increasing cultural diversity in informal community activities and facilities

The implementation plan includes:

- Upgrade our public address communication system that is dependent upon a 13-year old phone system with one that allows for multiple options within the system.
- Translate standard announcement (closing, emergency, seal demonstrations, zoo train departure times, weather and other public safety announcements, etc.) and play them in succession whenever an announcement is made in English
- Create a permanent welcome area that includes greetings in many languages
- Translate entrance instructions and front gate labels into multiple languages
- Create copies of our Zoo map where exhibits and amenities are labeled in languages other than English
- Translate the Safari Cafe menu so non-English speaking visitors can point to their choices and English speaking-only staff will know how to correctly fill the orders
- Label restrooms, first aid stations, phones, exits and entrances to all buildings in all languages
- Change the signs on our exhibits to include the identified languages
- Add more auditory interpretive devices and add additional language options to our existing ones

3. HOW THE PROJECT FITS INTO STRATEGIC PLAN AND MISSION

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4. STRATEGIC PLAN: PROCESS AND FINANCIAL RESOURCES

The Folsom Children's Zoo board engaged a professional strategic planning team to develop the Strategic Plan. The board and staff both held planning retreats and the strategic planners conducted community interviews with over 30 key players from the community, business sector, education field, and past zoo board members. A membership survey with zoo members as well as a community wide survey was conducted. Encounter interviews with visitors were also conducted on the zoo grounds. After receiving all of this feedback and then upon analyzing all of the results, the strategic planners assisted the zoo board in developing its new Mission Statement and also in the development of 4 strategic goals with action steps. A timeline for accomplishing those action steps was then established.

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5. APPROPRIATENESS OF PROJECT FOR INSTITUTION, AUDIENCE

Nebraska's foreign-born population more than doubled when Nebraska gained 46,000 immigrants between 1990 and 2000. According to the 2000 Current Population Survey by the U.S. Census Bureau about 156,000 people in Nebraska are immigrants or the children of immigrants -

representing 9% of the state of Nebraska's 2000 population, which was the sixth highest percentage in the country. *Appendix 2*

For Lincoln specifically, the 2000 data showed an increase of 155.6% in the immigration population since 1990, compared with the 13.6% increase in the native-born population. Thus, immigration directly accounted for 24.1 % of the city's population increase during that time. ¹

Lincoln, Nebraska - the location of Folsom Children's Zoo and Botanical Gardens - is one of the top cities in the United States for refugee resettlement. Because Lincoln has almost no unemployment and a relatively low cost of living, Lincoln, Nebraska, was selected by the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement as a preferred community for newly arrived refugees. It is one of the top-twenty cities in America for new arrivals from abroad.² There are children from fifty different nationalities who speak thirty-two different languages in the Lincoln public schools.³

Since opening 39 years ago, the Folsom Children's Zoo and Botanical Gardens has long served as a natural center of community engagement in the Lincoln area. The "Opening the Gates" program however, has helped to encourage these new residents to include the Zoo in their activities as a natural gathering place as they adjust to life in the United States, specifically in Lincoln, Nebraska.

The Zoo has a history of working with diverse populations. In 1996, the Zoo's Board of Directors established as a priority "to be an inclusive recreational, educational destination" and challenged the staff to make this a reality. The Zoo quickly took a more aggressive approach in bringing a more diverse group of children to the Zoo by offering special events on-site and on school grounds, providing scholarships for summer classes, and actively recruiting and subsidizing Zoo Crew youth volunteers from these diverse student populations.

Through the "Children at the Zoo" (CA TZ) program, Zoo members and benefactors provide free admission tickets to service agencies in Lincoln and the surrounding area. This year free admissions were given to the Asian Cultural Center, Hispanic Community Center, Indian Center, Lincoln Interfaith Council, Lincoln Public School's Indian Education Program, as well as many other agencies.

A grant from the May L. Flanagan Foundation in December, 2000 provided the first opportunity to interpret one of the Zoo's exhibits in a language other than English. When the new butterfly pavilion opened in June, 2001 all of the signs and graphics were written in English, Spanish and Vietnamese, the three most spoken languages other than English in the Lincoln Public Schools. Over the past two years all of the animal names on our exhibits have been translated into these languages.

In April, 2002 and 2003 the Zoo held evening guided tours for non-English speaking visitors. Volunteers from the English Language Learner team at a Lincoln High School who spoke Vietnamese, Spanish, Russian, Serbian, Arabic, Bosnia, Chinese, Ogoni, Dinka, and Nuer acted as guides for the tours and over 500 people participated. One hundred and six attendees completed the exit survey that is providing guidance in planning future multi-cultural activities and events at the Zoo. *Appendix 3*

In June 2003 the Zoo received a grant for \$25,000 from a community foundation that enabled an

¹ All numbers are from the U.S. Census Bureau (www.fairus.org/news/NeswPrint.cfm?ID=1538&c=9)

² Pipher, Mary, "In the Middle of Everywhere", Harcourt Books, 2002

³ Lincoln Public Schools census, 2003

outreach coordinator to be hired. This staff person has personally visited community centers, ethnic churches, shops, and community meetings serving these groups. Zoo staff and board members have completed surveys illuminating their attitudes toward and knowledge of diverse populations. These surveys will be tallied and common perceptions shared with both groups during workshops scheduled for January 2004 where representatives from the diverse communities will share information about their cultures. *Appendix 4-5-6*

6. PROJECT RESOURCES: TIME AND BUDGET

As soon as resources become available from IMLS the Folsom Children's Zoo stands ready to implement all projects and complete them as detailed in the Schedule of Completion.

7. PROJECT RESOURCES: PERSONNEL AND TECHNOLOGY

Folsom Children's Zoo education director, Mimi Wickless, has an M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction. In 2003, Ms. Wickless received an Opening the Gates grant from the Woods Charitable Foundation to create a network of culturally diverse community leaders who will assist non-profits in Lincoln in becoming more attune to the needs and how to service a multi-cultural population.

This committee is also acting as the evaluation committee. Members include:

1. Holly Burns, Director of the Hispanic Cultural Community Center
2. Hilde Dale, Team Leader for Lincoln Public School's Lincoln High English Language Learner classes
3. Robert K. Hitchcock, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Professor of Anthropology and advisor to the Sudanese Heritage Community Committee
4. Mary Pipher, Psychologist and author of "The Middle of Everywhere"⁴
5. Nicole Nuss, Director of Lincoln Action Program
6. Maria Vu, Past Director of the Asian Community Center
7. Rebecca Reinhardt, liaison for the Chinese Cultural Community Center

With the grant money, Ms. Wickless piloted the Zoo's language tour nights in 2002 and implemented seven of them in 2003 with guides from Lincoln Public Schools English Language Learner classes and arranged transportation through the various community centers. The grant also allowed the Zoo to hire a half-time Opening the Gates coordinator, Angela Witte, her responsibility is to find the culturally diverse leaders in the area, collaborate with them in behalf of the Zoo, and identify a network that will assist other non-profits. Both resumes are attached as appendices.

Folsom Children's Zoo facilities manager, Craig Anderson, has been with the Folsom Children's Zoo for 6 years and has 14 years of construction and maintenance management. Mr. Anderson will oversee the proper installation and testing of the new equipment, train staff in its use, and make sure that the timeline for installation adheres to the Schedule of Completion.

⁴ Pipher, Mary "The Middle of everywhere", Harcourt Books, 2002

BUDGET JUSTIFICATION

Salaries, Wages and Benefits:

Mimi Wickless is the project coordinator for the Opening the Gates program and she will continue to plan, implement and evaluate this program as per her job description.

Craig Anderson is the facilities manager and he will be responsible for overseeing purchasing, installation, testing and maintenance of the communications system.

Angie Witte is the Opening the Gates Outreach Coordinator and she will continue as per her job description making contacts and setting up the network.

Consultant Fees:

The Asian Cultural Community Center consults with the Zoo on the Vietnamese and Chinese cultural needs in Lincoln, the Zoo has contracted with them for 150 hours at \$10 per hour.

Alltel Communications will consult on the communication system and assist the facilities manager in training staff to use it.

Travel:

Two Zoo staff members will attend the national American Zoological Association Conference and participate in the Diversity Workshop in New Orleans. One staff member will participate in the Western Regional Workshop in San Diego.

Materials, Supplies and Equipment:

A new communication system is integral to the Opening the Gates program because it will give us the capacity to play recorded announcements throughout the Zoo in several languages. It will update the phones so recorded messages can be played in several languages.

The three existing Sound Posts at exhibits will have language options installed and two new sound posts will be added with multiple language options.

A welcome banner will provide the initial greeting to culturally diverse audiences.

Animal interpretive signs will have several languages added and symbols will be evaluated to see if they are universally understood.

Services:

Translators will be hired to translate the Zoo map, menu, building signs, and sound post scripts.

A staff training workshop will be held and conducted by community Cultural centers with stipends paid to each.

Language tours will be offered according to schedule and the tour guides, hosts, and transporters will all be paid.

Printing of the Zoo map, menu, and focus sheets will be done in several languages.

Other:

The zoo will share its knowledge with other community groups in an all day workshop where Lincoln's community center, refugee churches, and immigrant sponsors will share information and insights. Costs associated include: room rental, press announcements, stipends, coffee breaks, printed materials.